

Party Dress by VerityR

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Summary:

Nancy takes El shopping for a Snow Ball dress. Movie montage dress-up ensues, complete with fashion advice that's really life advice.

Party Dress

“So, uh.” Nancy slid a PB&J over the counter. “Mike’s not going to be home for awhile. Some AV club thing.”

Eleven took a bite of the sandwich, nodding.

“But I guess you knew that.” Nancy plunged the butter knife back into the jar, slathering peanut butter on a banana. “So, what’s up?”

El sighed, with a weariness that far surpassed her age.

“Mike asked me... to go to a dance.”

Nancy almost laughed, relieved to be dealing with teen girl problems for once, instead of end-of-the-world problems. Instead, she popped a slice of banana in her mouth. She was going to need fuel for this conversation.

“I don’t know what your deal with the Chief is or anything, but Mike will understand if you’re not allowed to go. I mean, he better.”

“Not that. I can convince him,” El declared, with a dismissive wave. “It’s... I need a dress.”

Nancy wasn’t quite sure what to say to that.

“I watch TV,” El said, quickly, as if Nancy was questioning her intel on school dances. “I would give it back. Not like last time.”

“Don’t worry about that.” Nancy was slightly embarrassed she’d given off the impression she was holding that against her. As weird as it had been to see a strange girl showing up in her tenth birthday dress, it’s not like she’d been planning to wear it again. “You can go through my closet if you want but... do you think the Chief would mind if I took you to the mall?”

Eleven’s eyes went wide. “I can call.”

After a call to Flo at the station, (or as Nancy always thought of her,

the first one to call the whole Jonathan thing) waiting around for a few minutes for Hopper to actually come to the phone, and then spending another few minutes assuring him that there was no emergency *per se*, Eleven had secured herself permission for an outing to the mall. The girl was good.

“You know,” Nancy hazarded, as she thumbed through a clothing rack. “You don’t have to wear a dress. If you don’t want to.”

El looked a little put off. She’d been hanging back, watching dutifully, not touching anything. “Girls wear dresses to dances.”

“Right,” Nancy answered, hesitantly. “But if you wanted something else, that’s okay too. You should wear whatever you like.”

Eleven didn’t reply, instead beginning to tentatively look through clothes herself, rubbing fabric between her index finger and thumb. Not wanting to push, Nancy let the silence hang, picking some things out and trying to guess at El’s size.

They had moved into a different section of the store before either spoke again.

“I don’t know what I like.” It sounded less like an admission, and more like a realization.

Nancy nodded. “We’ll try on a bunch of stuff.”

“Try on?” El furrowed her brow.

“C’mon,” Nancy said with a laugh, taking her by the hand. “This is going to be fun.”

For her first look, Nancy aimed for fairly neutral: a navy pencil skirt, a striped cream sweater.

El shook her head, pulling at the collar. “Itchy.”

A swing and a miss.

Next was a yellow blouse and charcoal slacks. Something comfortable, but still nice.

At the sight of herself in the three way mirror, El's face fell.

"Not pretty."

Nancy frowned, a little deflated. Maybe she was assuming too much based on the flannels and overalls El always seemed to wear. Her next choice was the sort of dress Nancy would've swooned over at that age; pink, with a high lacy collar, a V-shaped ruffle on the bodice, and a fairly poofy skirt.

Eleven came out of the dressing room looking wary. Once she got a look at herself, El's expression became even harder to read. She put her hand to her chin and dropped it, as if to confirm that the person in the mirror was her.

"You should spin around in it," Nancy insisted. "It's part of the whole thing."

Eleven didn't look convinced, but twirled nonetheless. She almost cracked a smile, taken by surprise at the fullness of the skirt. Unlike the first two tries, El didn't offer up any immediate review, still looking at herself in the mirror, swaying slightly to see the fabric move.

Before Nancy could ask for the verdict, Eleven turned to her and spoke.

"Pretty?"

Nancy faltered. Something in El's tone had thrown her.

"Do *you* think it's pretty?"

Eleven stared at her, looking fairly exasperated.

"Actually, forget that." Nancy ran a hand through her hair, searching for the right words. "Pretty doesn't matter. Not that you aren't pretty, but—" She sighed. "I'm not explaining this right."

Eleven turned away from her again, looking back at her reflection. "On TV," she said, sounding unsure of herself. "The girl cried because they put braces on her teeth. And she wouldn't be pretty. For the

dance.”

Okay. Nancy took a breath. She could work with this. Actually, she was pretty certain she’d seen that exact episode of *The Brady Bunch*.

“She was afraid of what people would think about her,” Nancy said, cautiously. “But you don’t have to be afraid of that.”

El still didn’t look especially convinced, tugging at the hem of the dress.

“No one’s going to know who you are,” Nancy went on, lowering her voice. Better safe than sorry. “If Hopper says you can go, you know it’s safe. You don’t have to prove anything. You’ll be just like everyone else.”

“Everyone wants to be pretty.”

Nancy felt a pit in her stomach. Jesus, how could someone who’d spent twelve years of her life in a lab already be so inundated with ideas of what a girl should be?

“Fashion isn’t about being pretty,” Nancy said, with more strength than she felt. “It’s about... making yourself look on the outside like how you feel on the inside.”

“On the inside,” El repeated to herself under her breath.

“I’m happy to help you find something. I mean, all of this would probably be too overwhelming on your own. But I can’t tell you what’s pretty, or what you should wear. No one can. It’s like telling you who you are.”

Another silence. Nancy thought maybe she was getting used to the rhythm of El’s speech.

“I don’t think this is... me.” El said, after a moment. “But I liked the spinning.”

Nancy laughed. “I’ll keep that in mind.” She handed El the next outfit. “Go change. We’ve got a lot of work to do.”

Author's Note:

Best enjoyed while listening to any Lana Del Rey song that mentions party dresses. So, any of them. Bit of a change of pace for me, but I hold the idea of a Nancy/Eleven friendship so dear!